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[Home](#)

[Archives](#)

[Submissions](#)

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[2016 Contests](#)

[GBR Blog](#)

Fall 2018: Issue 5.1



[Reign in Love](#)
Alberto Sveum
[poetry]

[She Comes Singing](#)
Thomas Piekarski
[poetry]

[Sharing Something](#)
Scott Hutchison
[poetry]

[Moonlight at Last](#)
Scott Hutchison
[poetry]

[Fast](#)
Meg Waddington
[cover art]

[watching men watch women on
subways](#)
Clara Alfaro
[nonfiction]

[A Summoning in Section 292.1.J-P](#)
Anya Josephs
[fiction]

[Delta 1: What We Called
Pickleweed Was Everywhere](#)
David Koehn
[poetry]

[Delta 19: If You Were Given a Self-
Driving Car, What Would You Do
With It?](#)
David Koehn
[poetry]

[When Czechoslovakia Was Still
a Country](#)
Tad Bartlett
[fiction]

[Family Portraits Are an Art](#)
Jeff Newberry
[nonfiction]

[Another Word for Deteriorating
Over Time](#)
Zebulon Huset
[poetry]

[Rainy Staycation Hymn](#)
Zebulon Huset
[poetry]

[More Love](#)
Julie Wittes Schlack
[nonfiction]

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Green Briar Review: Blog

[Dan L. Miller: The Habits of Highly Effective Authors—and Me](#)

by Green Briar Review on 11/01/18

The Habits of Highly Effective Authors—and Me By Dan L. Miller

The writing process crushes souls, and writers seek solace in habits and paraphernalia to help them through the struggle. Writing comforts me, though, when I enter my home office and settle into the current project. I'm insulated from the outside world of tension and discord. My wall of books, shelved souvenirs, artwork, fresh flowers, and music playlist energize me as I toil at a task normally fraught with frustration.

I work at a slanted, hardwood writing desk with my keyboard settled against the bottom lip—easily movable for the grunt work involved in pencil and paper planning or revision. The writing desk sits atop my prized possession—an antique oak table fashioned in the 19th century from a square grand piano passed down through generations.

I struggle with choices—an agreeable ambiance, ideal illumination, the proper pencil, and music or silence. Franz Kafka needed not the solitude of a hermit but the silence of a dead man to write. Surroundings resonant with cherished music sustain my writing, but only chamber music—Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart—benefits deep thinking.

Sylvia Plath wrote on pink, lovely-textured Smith memorandum pads. Me? I prefer to scrawl on the backs of rejections printed on finely-textured stationery from all the best publishing houses. E. L. Doctorow wrote in his attic at a desk facing the wall, while John Cheever preferred the darkened basement of his apartment building, writing next to the furnace. I need sunshine through my window and a view of my

neighbors schlepping their backpacks and briefcases through the harsh, winter snow, digging out their cars, and starting their office commute. Friedrich von Schiller kept a rotting apple on his desk because the odor stimulated him. Drugs and alcohol fueled the writing of the classics penned by Thomas De Quincey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Edgar Allan Poe. No drugs, no alcohol, no disgusting fruit, but only the delicate scent of vanilla essential oils waft through my home office and sustain my sense of tranquility as I write.

John Steinbeck used only round pencils because hexagonal pencils cut his fingers after a day's use. Round pencils shift in my fingers and lack the gravitas of the hexagon. I use only hexagonal pencils for notes and outlines—red pencils for revising words and blue pencils for editing grammar and phrases. Edmond Rostand wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac* in his bathtub, but I doze, so my manuscript would be rejected not by a publisher but by bathwater.

Catherine O'Hara wrote most effectively at nighttime when everyone else was asleep and she was alone with her ideas. I only revise at night, while I tackle my hard-core thinking at midday after my morning wake-up rituals and before my evening fatigue.

Ray Bradbury believed an author should stuff oneself with “poems, essays, plays, stories, novels, films, comic strips, magazines, music” in order to explode every morning and never dry up. I follow his recommendation, and I've never lacked the motivation to write or the need to search for projects. Writer's block? To me it's like boredom. It simply doesn't exist.

I write also when not in my home office, and it's usually at social gatherings or events—I'm writing in my head. My wife is the one to nudge me and tell me to stop writing. I jot notes on playbills, I wake in the night to record brilliant ideas delivered in a dream, and I dictate to my iPhone while at a ballgame the plot for my next story. My world of writing unfolds most effectively, however, in my home office. I thrive in my sanctuary closed to reality and open to the world of imagination.

*Dan L. Miller (danmillereducationauthor.com) writes on education-related topics and is the author of the young adult thriller *Snowballs and Sinners*.*